

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

## news release

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### AIR FORCE, INTERIOR AGREE ON NEW PROTECTIVE MEASURES FOR WHOOPING CRANES

Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton and Secretary of the Air Force Robert C. Seamans, Jr., today announced an agreement that will permit extra protective measures to be taken for whooping cranes wintering on Matagorda Island, an Air Force Range on Texas' Gulf Coast.

Matagorda Island's 50,000 acres lie adjacent to Aransas National Wildlife Refuge operated by Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service. Both areas serve as winter home for the world's remaining wild whooping cranes after this endangered bird makes its annual migration, now underway, from Canada's Wood Buffalo National Park near the Arctic Circle.

The new agreement will permit Interior to undertake habitat improvement projects on the Island as well as to conduct patrol operations. Air Force use of the area is unaffected. The Air Force uses Matagorda as a bombing range, but restricts its activities to classwork and ground training when the whoopers are present. The Range area will be administered as an additional portion of the 30,000,000-acre national wildlife refuge system.

"The agreement is evidence of man's increasing dedication to preserve whooping cranes and other living things that are threatened by extinction," Secretary Morton said.

The whooping crane has been waging a long but increasingly successful battle to escape extinction. When Aransas Refuge was established in 1937, only about 15 of these birds remained. Last winter, a record 57 wintered on Aransas or Matagorda.

Cranes favor these areas because of their shallow coastal waters and tidal flats. Whoopers feed mostly on crabs and other marine animals.

In recent years, more and more cranes have been establishing territories on Matagorda, and the Air Force has modified its activities to insure their well-being.

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